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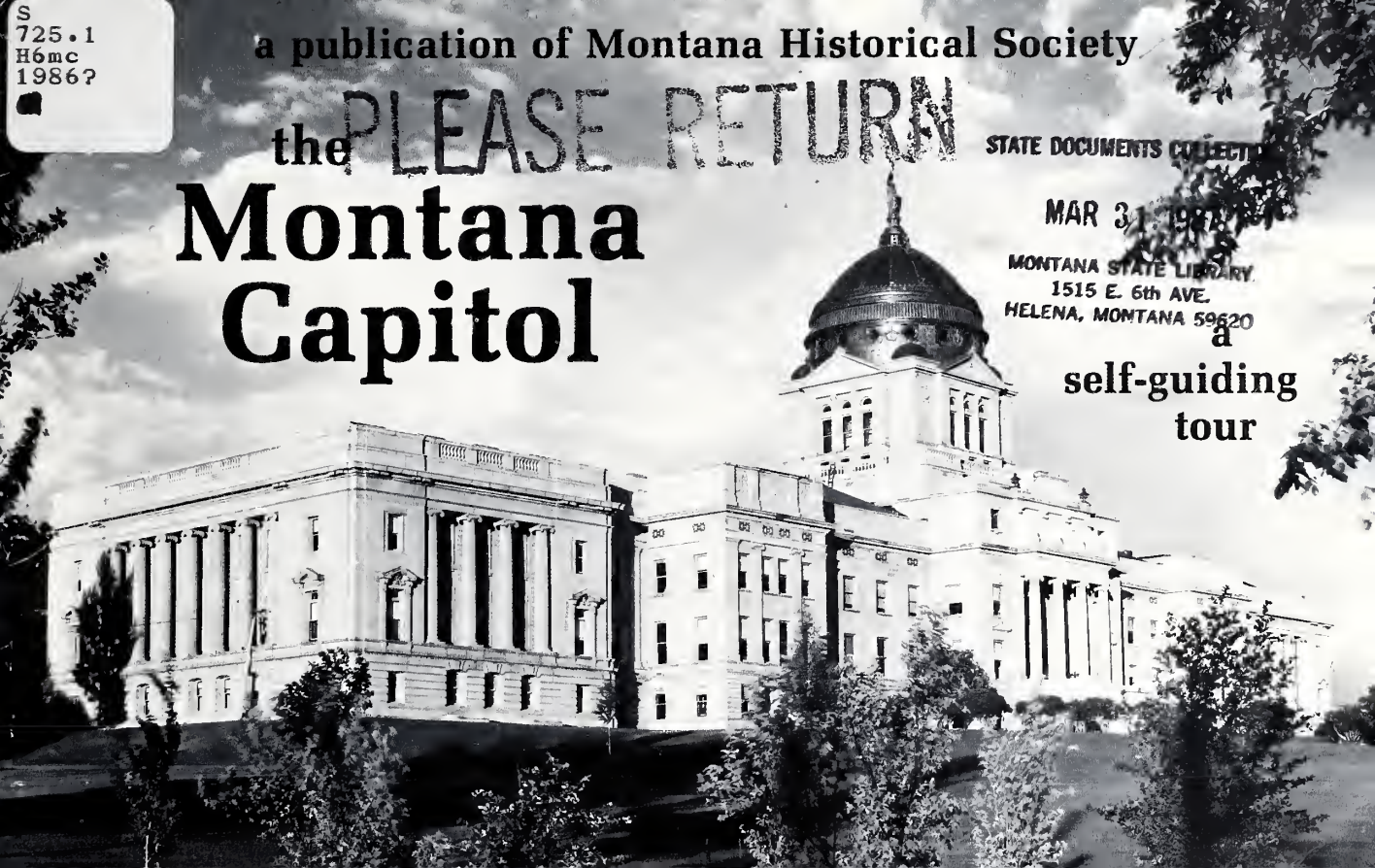
the Montana Capitol

a self-guiding tour



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The Montana capitol : a self-guiding tour
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Montana's Capitol depicts the heritage of our people. The vast expanses and abundant resources. . . the beauty of the land and the character of our good people are expressed in the artwork throughout the building.

Here you will see trappers, cowboys, explorers, miners, Indians, and homesteaders—all contributors to our identity as Montanans.

The spirit of the Big Sky Country is embodied here—a zest for adventure, a pioneering nature and a lasting respect for democracy.

In 1989, Montanans celebate our first 100 years as a state. I invite you to experience Montana and share in the excitement of our young, growing state.

Enjoy your visit here, Montana—the Last of What is Best in America—welcomes you.

Ted Schwinden

Montana's Capitol as it appeared upon completion in 1902, before the east and west wings were added.

TED SCHWINDEN, Governor

Montana Capitol tours, and this self-guiding tour booklet, are under the responsibilty of, and produced by, the Montana Historical Society.

Introduction

Situated against a backdrop of the hills of Helena, the Montana state capitol commands a panoramic view over the Helena Valley, which explorers Lewis and Clark named the "Prickly Pear Valley" when they traversed it in their journey of 1805. A century of exploration, trapping, prospecting, mining, settlement and development had occurred in what became Montana, before the milestone of building a state capitol was achieved. The story of that development would be painted on these statehouse walls, commemorating the frontier that had once seemed so vast.

When Montana Territory achieved statehood in 1889, construction of a home for the new government was as yet a decade away. The natural struggles of political development were complicated by a severe economic depression that began in 1893, a bitter contest for location of the permanent capital in 1892-1894, and an unsuccessful attempt in 1895-1897 to construct a $1 million capitol that the young state could not afford.

The city of Helena had served as capital for the territory since 1875. Just over one decade old at that time, the former gold camp of Last Chance Gulch had already transformed itself into the territory's banking center by 1870. Surviving the test of the mid-1890s depression, the city began to grow outward from the nucleus of its gold-rich gulch. When the capitol site was selected, it lay beyond the more developed sections of the city.

With Butte copper king William A. Clark as its champion, Helena achieved victory in the capital contest of 1894, decided by statewide ballot. Clark's personal feud with rival copper baron Marcus Daly of Anaconda, who wanted the capital in the town he had built, produced legendary civic rivalry. One expression was in the Helena Victory Parade, in which one float boldly featured a huge statue of the Goddess of Liberty—representing Helena—with her foot resting on the head of a giant anaconda. Helena's triumph was recalled six years later, when a statue of Liberty was placed on the crown of the capitol's copper-sheathed dome. The celebration of Liberty and other democratic ideals was a traditional function of symbol-laden capitols in America. Visible from afar, the dome itself served as a reminder of the importance of the mining industry—once dominated by Clark and Daly—to Montana's economy and political culture.

Optimism about the state's future led the 1895 legislature to enact laws authorizing a $1 million capitol, its design to be chosen in a nationwide architectural competition. Cash prizes were awarded and a design selected before funding problems were understood to be insurmountable. To make matters worse, scandal erupted when it was discovered that the capitol commissioners themselves planned to defraud the state of substantial portions of the building's cost. Investigations were conducted in time to prevent the graft, replace the commissioners, and begin anew. In response to Democratic-Populist Governor Robert Burns Smith's plea for application of the "pruning knife" to state government, the 1897 legislature then authorized a more modest statehouse. The completed, furnished building, located on its donated parcel of land, cost approximately $485,000—less than half the price of the abandoned design.

In 1898, Charles Emlen Bell and John Hackett Kent of Council Bluffs, Iowa, were selected as capitol architects on the condition that they relocate in Helena to fulfill a legislative provision requiring selection of a Montana architect. Although denounced by the state's resident architects, the selection proved to be a fortunate one, resulting in a handsome design that was promptly

realized. After a festive cornerstone-laying ceremony on Independence Day, 1899, Bell and Kent's "Greek Ionic" neoclassical capitol was constructed, faced in sandstone from a Columbus, Montana quarry. The building was dedicated with much appreciative fanfare on July 4, 1902.

After its first decade, the capitol was enlarged (1909-1912) to accommodate the growing executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. East and west wing additions were designed by New York architect Frank M. Andrews in association with Montanans John G. Link and Charles S. Haire. The much-debated selection of stone for facing the wings required a special session of the legislature, which chose Jefferson County granite. A good match for the Columbus sandstone used in the original building, the granite had the added advantage of durability.

The state capitol is a structure with several historical dimensions. Interwoven with Montana's development as a state, the building's origins recall people and practices from another age. These early Montanans, conscious of their place in the progression of time, chose architecture and art that described a remote classical past as well as the passing era of the frontier. Yet they focused optimistically on the future as well. Today the capitol is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and continues to be associated with events significant to the citizens and government of Montana.

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

The instructions in bold-face type like this will guide you through the building from the Rotunda, where you are now, back again to this spot. Alternate instructions are available, here at this table, for those who cannot use the stairs.

ROTUNDA

The main colonnaded portico of the capitol leads into an ornate, dome-covered rotunda where the designs of architects Bell & Kent and interior decorators F. Pedretti's Sons introduce the themes of the building's architecture and art. The Ionic columns surrounding the Rotunda are a reminder that the capitol is the center of democratic government for Montana. The decorative paintings above, selected by Governor Joseph K. Toole and completed by F. Pedretti's Sons in 1902, feature four important contributors to Montana history: the Native American, the rancher, the hunter and trapper, and the prospector. These four groups of people reappear in murals throughout the building. Through these murals, the capitol becomes more than a center of state government, it becomes a museum of Montana history.

To the right of the painting of the Indian, on the third or gallery level of the rotunda, is a painting by San Francisco artist Amedee Joullin, *The Driving of the Golden Spike*. The 1883 joining of east to west by the transcontinental Northern Pacific railroad passing through Montana was an event rivalling statehood itself in significance to the state's economic development. In the painting, Henry Villard, president of the Northern Pacific, is portrayed in company with President Ulysses S. Grant, a delegation of Crow Indians, and other celebrants at the ceremony that put Gold Creek, Montana, briefly into the national spotlight.

Portrait busts of nationally prominent U.S. Senators Thomas J. Walsh, Burton K. Wheeler, and Joseph M. Dixon (who also served as governor for one term) occupy niches in the corners of the Rotunda. Opposite the main entrance, in the grand stair hall, is a statue of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to be elected to

Rotunda

The rotunda as it originally appeared in 1902 featured a barrel vault skylight sheltering the grand stairway. A special evening reception was held at dedication time for the purpose of displaying the "illumination" of the rotunda. Electric light fixtures adorned the columns, the newel posts and the outer rim of the vault. Glass block floor tiles known as "Hyatt lights" reflected electric light by night and natural light by day. Deep red walls provided a dramatic background for the abundant ornamentation.

All photographs from Montana Historical Society unless otherwise indicated.

the U.S. Congress, and the only member of Congress to vote against both world wars.

Ascend the grand stairway, turn left and mount the nearby flight of stairs. Your next stop will be the former Supreme Court chamber, where a meeting might be in session. If that is the case, you are welcome to enter but do so silently. Enter the door marked 411, and you are in the former Supreme Court Gallery.

FORMER SUPREME COURT and SENATE CHAMBER

This chamber housed the State Senate when the capitol first opened in 1902. Ten years later, with the building's remodeling it became the home of the State Supreme Court and remained the court chamber until the fall of 1982. The Supreme Court is now located in the new Justice Building, two blocks east of the capitol. This room currently is used for committee hearings and public meetings.

The skylit chamber has changed little since the 1912 additions necessitated removing the Senate to its present location on the opposite side of the rotunda, and installing in its place the Supreme Court. At that time, space was also provided for an adjoining law library. The scagliola columns in the apse-shaped Supreme Court chamber are colored to resemble Italian marble. A wainscot of Tennessee marble rises to meet the columns at their base. The stained glass skylight and the interior decorations are largely original, as is the mahogany furniture. A centrally placed bronze plaque honors Chief Justice Theodore Brantly, who served on the court from 1899 to 1922.

Here the Pedretti paintings selected by Governor Toole (left to right) represent: the "Gates of the Mountains," located north of Helena on the Missouri River and named by explorers Lewis and Clark; "The Attack," a view of Native Americans as mere obstacles to the "taming" of the West; President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James G. Blaine accepting Montana's constitution and thus approving statehood on November 8, 1889; Meriwether Lewis and party viewing the Rocky Mountains for the first time; President Grover Cleveland, Secretary of State Thomas Bayard and Territorial Delegate Joseph K. Toole (standing) on February 22, 1889, at the signing of the Enabling Act, allowing Montana to take the final steps toward statehood; and two paintings illustrating Native American participation in the western experience, first, hunting bison in eastern Montana, and then mourning the end of traditional Indian life (represented by the bison), which was effected by white instrusion (represented by the railroad).

Exit the former Supreme Court through the same door you used in entering. Turn right and follow the hallway around two sides of the Rotunda, which can be viewed through metal grills along the corridor. Enter the door straight ahead. This takes you to the rear of the Gallery of the Senate.

SENATE

The Montana Senate consists of fifty senators, elected for four-year terms. The Democrats are seated on the right, the Republicans on the left. The President of the Senate occupies the chair at the head of the rostrum, with legislative staff members seated in the half-circle immediately beneath the presiding officer's chair. The seating at the base of the rostrum accommodates pages, who act as messengers for the senators. To summon a page, or to vote, the senators press the appropriate button on the

Former Supreme Court

The Supreme Court chamber is seen here as it was when it served as the Senate, before 1912. Except for the removal of the senators' desks and chairs, the rostrum and the chandelier, the chamber has changed little. Tennessee marble wainscoting, scagliola columns, stained glass skylight and mural paintings of F. Pedretti's Sons are among the significant features that remain.

Inset photo courtesy Crossman-Whitney-Griffin PC, Architects

Senate

In 1912 the House of Representatives moved to more spacious quarters in the new west wing, leaving their chamber for the Senate. Today's modernized Senate (small inset photo) shows little resemblance to the chamber's original appearance—as seen in this pre-1912 photo—although murals, decorations and mouldings around the ceiling area remain.

House of Representatives

The 1912 wing additions included the House of Representatives chamber, the largest room in the capitol. Now accommodating 100 representatives, the chamber remains as it was built, except for minor changes such as the installation of an electronic voting system. Vermont marble columns set off the large central space from the side aisles, which are lined with windows. Additional natural light is provided by the decorative stained-glass skylight.

box located on each desk. Votes are registered electronically and appear in lights on the large board at your eye level to the front of the chamber.

Substantially altered by a mid-1960s renovation and remodelling project, the Senate chamber is original only above the gilt *capitals*, or tops, of the now-covered columns. The skylight, however, has been replaced by electric light fixtures. The original mahogany desks have been replaced, but the rostrum, also mahogany, is original to the Senate when it was housed in the chamber recently vacated by the Supreme Court. The painting immediately above the rostrum is a reproduction of the Charles M. Russell painting, *When the Land Belonged to God*, which for many years was displayed at the Montana club in downtown Helena. The original is now on view at the Montana Historical Society, located across Roberts Street from the capitol.

The F. Pedretti's Sons murals that Governor Toole chose for the chamber illustrate important developments in the white's settlement of the region. The mural above the rostrum is symbolic of the acquisition of western lands, including Montana, from France in 1803—the famous Louisiana Purchase. The painting includes portraits of Thomas Jefferson (seated right) and Napoleon Bonaparte (seated right), whose representatives—Robert Livingston, James Monroe, and Marquis de Barbe-Marbois (pictured in the center)—were the ones who actually negotiated the purchase. On the left, the story unfolds with the Lewis and Clark Expedition at Three Forks in 1805, then fur traders Andrew Dawson and Pierre Chouteau, Jr. in the 1840s at Fort Benton, the American Fur Company post on the Missouri. On the right, Jesuit fathers, Pierre-Jean DeSmet and Anthony Ravalli are pictured in western Montana where they served in the 1840s and 1850s as missionaries to the Salish Indians at St. Mary's Mission in the Bitterroot Valley. Then, you see a group of gold prospectors at Nelson Gulch near Helena in 1864. The discovery of gold brought thousands to Montana and eventually led to conflict with Native Americans who objected to white expansion. To follow the story, walk down either side gallery to the final mural, the Battle of the Little Big Horn (Custer's Last Stand) in 1876.

Now enter the hall on the far side of the Senate chamber, which passes behind the large vote board. Exit through the door in the center of this hall, and walk straight ahead through the corridor and up the small flight of carpeted stairs.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Montana House of Representatives consists of one hundred representatives, elected to two-year terms. Because the Montana Legislature meets every two years, members must be re-elected for each session in which they serve. As in the Senate, the Democrats sit on the right and the Republicans on the left. The Speaker of the House is the presiding officer, and occupies the position at the head of the rostrum, with legislative staff at the next level below. Pages, who are seated encircling the rostrum, are summoned by lights controlled at each desk. Those controls also connect to the electronic voting system which registers each representative's vote on the boards at the front corners of the chamber.

The House of Representatives chamber occupies the 1912 west wing addition designed by Frank M. Andrews of New York, in association with Montana architects Link & Haire. The oak rostrum predates the other furnishings by a decade, being part of the original furnishings from the House of Represen-

Lewis and Clark Meeting the Flathead Indians at Ross' Hole, **by Charles M. Russell, portrays a scene which took place on September 4, 1805, when the Lewis and Clark expedition reached the Sula Basin area near Missoula, on their return journey through Montana. The mural occupies a prominent place above the Speaker's platform at the front of the House of Representatives chamber. Extensive conservation work was completed during the sixties and seventies, to protect, preserve and repair the mural.**

tatives' former location in the 1902 structure. The remaining furnishings and decorations are original to the 1912 design, including Vermont marble wainscoting and columns, stained glass skylight (some panels removed), and oak desks and chairs. Dominating the large chamber is Charles M. Russell's painting, *Lewis and Clark Meeting the Flathead Indians at Ross' Hole*, portraying the scene from September 4, 1805, near the headwaters of the Bitterroot River. The work was commissioned in 1911 by Governor Edwin Norris and the Board of Examiners (acting as a capitol commission) for a nominal price of $4,600. This now priceless painting is considered by modern critics to be Russell's masterpiece. Its composition emphasizes that Lewis and Clark were merely traveling through a region dominated by Native Americans in 1805.

Exit through the same door entered, descend 3 steps, turn right to descend stairway. At the next level down (third floor), enter the corridor, and turn left to enter the Lobby of the House of Representatives. Note: When the Legislature is in session, the House Lobby is not open for touring. In that case, continue on down the stairs.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES LOBBY

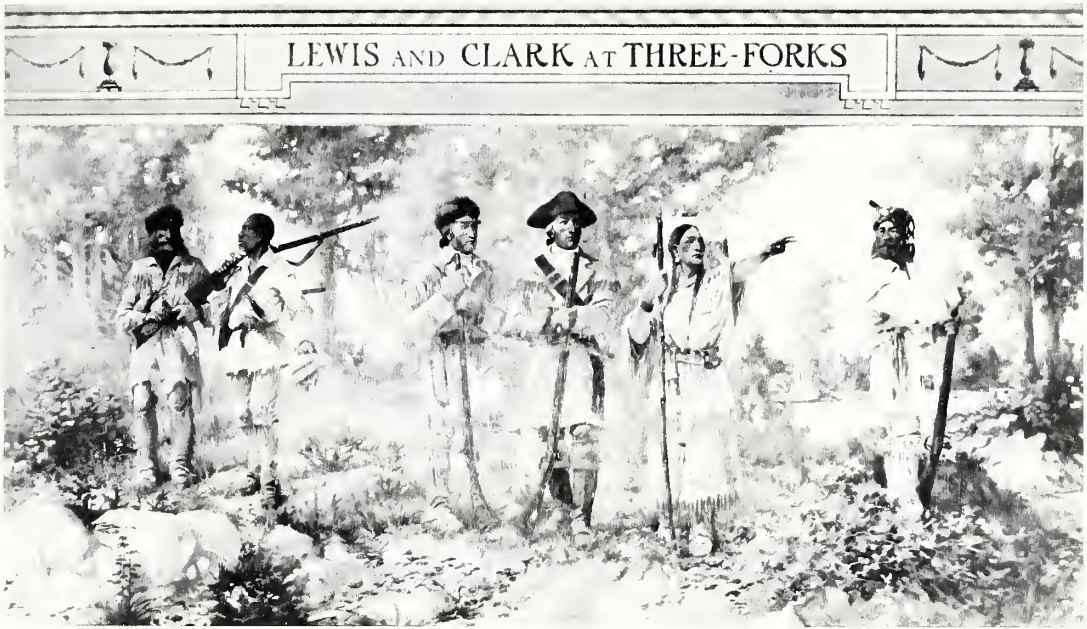
The lobby of the House of Representatives houses six murals by Montana artist Edgar S. Paxson, whose work was commissioned and executed in 1911 and 1912, at the same time as the Russell painting in the House chamber. These murals portray important individuals and events in the history of Indian-white relationships in Montana. The murals are: *Pierre de la Verendrye*, a French-Canadian trader who first met Montana Indians in the 1730s at the Mandan villages in North Dakota; *Lewis at Black Eagle Falls*, depicting Lewis and Patrick Gass on June 13, 1805, at the north bluff of the falls (present-day Great Falls); *Lewis and Clark at Three Forks*, portraying the major members of the expedition at the headwaters of the Missouri River; *The Border Land*, suggesting the threat that white settlers posed to the Indian way of life; *After the Whiteman's Book*, representing a group of Iroquois and Salish Indians traveling to St. Louis in the 1830s to bring back a priest and the Bible to western Montana; and, *Surrender of Chief Joseph*, Nez Perce chief to Gen. Nelson A. Miles in 1877, which symbolizes the end of Indian-white conflict in Montana.

Return to the stairway you used to reach this level and descend to the next level down. In this hallway to your right, you will pass through the Gallery of Outstanding Montanans on your way back to the Rotunda, where the tour began.

When no function is taking place in the Reception Room, visitors may proceed to the governor's wing at the end of the corridor opposite the Gallery of Outstanding Montanans. The receptionist will direct you to the entrance, which is beyond the doorway marked "Office of the Governor."

GOVERNOR'S RECEPTION ROOM

The Governor's Reception Room was designed as an Elizabethan "period room" by Frank Mills Andrews in 1912. Paneled in dark oak, the room is divided into three main sections with side aisles. The spatial division is accomplished by fluted oak columns, whose capitals are hand-carved. Fireplaces of Vermont marble were intentionally designed to serve as nonfunctioning ornaments at either end of the long room. To the right of the fireplace at your left (as you enter) is a small, almost hidden



Lewis and Clark at Three Forks, **by Edgar S. Paxson, portrays Meriwether Lewis (center) and William Clark (left of center) with imagined portraits of Sacagawea, Clark's black slave York, and two other expedition members. They reached Three Forks, the headwaters of the Missouri River, on August 17, 1805, westward bound for the Pacific Ocean.**

door leading to the governor's private office. At the opposite, far end of the room, a portrait of Governor Toole, first governor of the State of Montana, hangs above the fireplace. The ceiling is in Tudor design, hand-painted and hung with "antique" finish silver plate chandeliers, which match the wall sconces and the fireplace andirons and tools. Most of the furnishings in the room are original. The brass doorknobs are decorated in detailed relief with the great seal of the state of Montana.

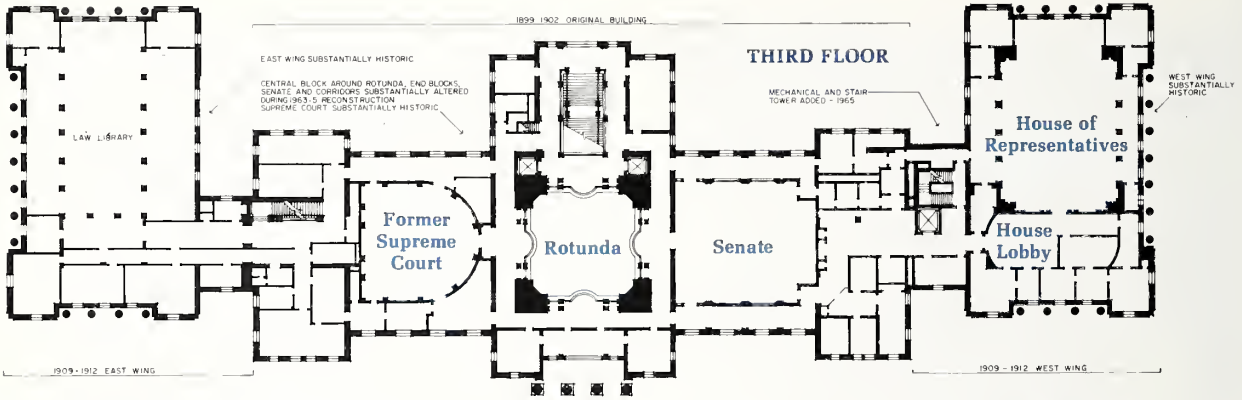
EXTERIOR STATUES

Thomas Francis Meagher (pronounced Mar) appears in the equestrian statue in front of the capitol. An Irish revolutionary of the mid-19th century, he emigrated to the United States where he distinguished himself as general of the Irish Brigade in the Civil War. The flamboyant Meagher, appointed Secretary of Montana Territory in 1865, twice served as Acting Governor—once attempting to guide the new territory to statehood even though it didn't yet have the population to qualify. Meagher apparently drowned in the Missouri River at Fort Benton in 1867, and the circumstances of his death are still a mystery. His statue was given by the people of Montana, especially the large population of Irish descent, in 1905.

Wilbur Fisk Sanders is represented by the larger-than-life statue facing the back, ground-floor entrance. Active in Montana politics from the early territorial days, he was one of the first two U.S. Senators when Montana achieved statehood. Sanders, a lawyer, was a fearless Vigilante leader in Virginia City—once acting as prosecutor in an outdoor "miner's court" where friends of the defendant kept Sanders within their gunsights. The inscribed quotation, "Men, do your duty," was Sanders' charge to Vigilantes preparing to hang convicted highwaymen.

The *Governor's Reception Room* **incorporates the bitterroot blossom, Montana's state flower, in its trefoiled ceiling design.**

At left, the statue honoring *Thomas Meagher,* **which was dedicated on July 4, 1905. At right, the statue of** *Wilbur Fisk Sanders* **as it appeared upon dedication in 1913, located then in the rotunda.**


1899-1902 ORIGINAL BUILDING
EAST WING SUBSTANTIALLY HISTORIC
CENTRAL BLOCK AROUND ROTUNDA, END BLOCKS, SENATE AND CORRIDORS SUBSTANTIALLY ALTERED DURING 1963-5 RECONSTRUCTION
SUPREME COURT SUBSTANTIALLY HISTORIC
THIRD FLOOR
MECHANICAL AND STAIR TOWER ADDED - 1965
WEST WING SUBSTANTIALLY HISTORIC
LAW LIBRARY
Former Supreme Court
Rotunda
Senate
House of Representatives
House Lobby
1909-1912 EAST WING
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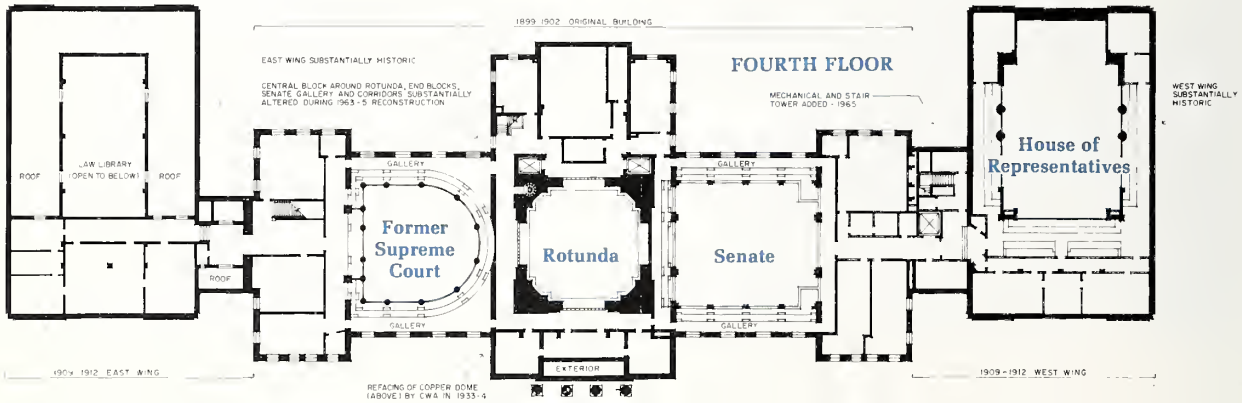
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Senate
House of Representatives
EXTERIOR
REFACING OF COPPER DOME (ABOVE) BY CWA IN 1933-4
1909-1912 EAST WING
1909-1912 WEST WING